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SUBJECT: ANTI-SEMITISM ROUND TABLE HIGHLIGHTS RECENT INCIDENTS IN CROATIA

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Following several incidents targeting members of the Jewish community in early June, community leaders organized a round table on anti-Semitism in Croatia June 20. Director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center Ephraim Zuroff, representatives of ethnic minorities, the Catholic Church, Islamic community and diplomats including the U.S. Embassy DCM, were among the speakers. Most participants agreed that anti-Semitism was not widespread in Croatia, but that lack of strong timely government reaction to the incidents could create an atmosphere condoning intolerance towards minorities in general. The event received positive media coverage and served to highlight both the incidents and the importance of promoting tolerance in Croatian society. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT

¶2. Background: In early June a group of skinheads made a Nazi salute, pushed and verbally attacked rabbi Zvi Eliezer Aloni in downtown Zagreb. During the previous week, the Jewish community received two threatening e-mails; one threatened to "pay Palestinians to destroy Jews" and the other denied the Holocaust and offended Jews. In its statement of condemnation, the Jewish Community said that the incidents "recalled the times they thought passed long ago". The Government failed to issue a visible and timely reaction. The Parliament's Human Rights and National Minorities' Committee was the only state body to promptly react. Its president Furio Radin (a representative of the Italian minority) condemned the incidents, stating that intolerance against minorities had reached very high levels. Pierre Besnianiou, head of the World Jewish Congress, visiting Zagreb in June, also urged the GOC to strengthen its laws against anti-Semitism. Subsequently, Parliament passed an amendment to the Penal Code that explicitly defines ethnically motivated crime and toughens sanctions against such crimes.

¶3. President of the Croatian Helsinki Committee, Zarko Puhovski, who facilitated the participation of over 20 speakers at the round table, stressed that no community can prevent such assaults, but that permissiveness of a society was a problem and that competent bodies must find efficient ways to deter such incidents. He added that anti-Semitism never appeared alone, but along with intolerance of other ethnicities. Similarly, Serb MP Milorad Pupovac, said that anti-Semitism indicated a general lack of preconditions for protection of minorities. He expressed concern that passage of the hate-crimes law in June required strong lobbying by minority MPs, and was not automatically supported by the entire political spectrum. The OSCE Head of Mission to Croatia Jorge Fuentes struck a moderate note claiming that the Jewish problem in Croatia was not

widespread - perhaps partly due to its small size of less than 500 according to the last census -- but commended the inclusion of hate crimes in the Penal Code.

¶4. Efraim Zuroff of the Wiesenthal Center noted that anti-Semitism was on the rise in all transitional countries of Eastern Europe. While all the governments acknowledged guilt for anti-Semitism or the Holocaust, they invariably did this in Israel and postponed such acknowledgment in their own countries. Zuroff commended Croatia for prosecuting the former commander of the Jasenovac concentration camp Dinko Sakic and requesting extradition of Milivoj Asner. But the record remains mixed, with former Ustasha Prefect of Dubrovnik Ivo Rojnica still at large in Argentina. Zuroff recalled that late president Tudjman intended to name Rojnica an Ambassador to Argentina. Updating schoolbooks with information on the wider context of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust still remains an outstanding issue.

¶5. The media reported that the U.S. Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission depicted anti-Semitism as a global problem and gave an account of USG cooperation with the Government on Holocaust education; most notably, cooperation continues between the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the Jasenovac Memorial Center in Croatia. The U.S. government also assisted Croatia in meeting requirements to become a full member of the International Task Force for Education on the Holocaust.

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